

TWO VARIETIES OF ADENA BI-CONCAVE GORGETS AND THE ADENA PROBLEM IN OHIO

by

Robert N. Converse

199 Converse Drive, Plain City, OH 43064

The Adena people were the first aboriginal people in the Ohio Valley to construct artificial burial mounds. Their mounds are scattered across the landscape primarily in the southern half of Ohio, in central and eastern Kentucky, around Charleston and the panhandle of West Virginia, and western Pennsylvania. An extension of the Adena culture is found on the East Coast, particularly in the Delmarva area.

A facet of the Adena culture in Ohio which has received little professional attention is that there is a great deal of Adena evidence in northern Ohio where there are few Adena mounds and in areas generally thought to be outside the central Adena homeland. Professionals, as a general rule, cast a jaundiced eye at surface-found material — they often disregard it or are unaware of it. Yet, there have probably been more Adena slate artifacts found north of Columbus than have ever been excavated from all the Adena mounds in the central-southern Ohio Adena area.

In addition to the Adena slate evidence in northern Ohio there are the large Adena surface-found spears. Knowledgeable collectors know that the large surface-found Adena spears — those more than six inches long — are almost always found north of Columbus. (The last large Adena spear found under such circumstances I have seen was a seven inch Flint Ridge example found on the surface in Ashtabula County.*)

Related to this aspect of the Adena problem is the occurrence of the large number of Adena caches of Flint Ridge blades found in northern Ohio. These are almost always unearthed accidentally by farming operations where there is little or no opportunity of studying their burial circumstances. Many of these caches are truly spectacular and represent the largest occurrences of Flint Ridge flint artifacts in a single context any place outside of Flint Ridge. Although cache blades are often found in mounds in the central Adena area in no instance have they occurred in the quantities or numbers of those which have been found in northern Ohio.

Certain areas of Ohio outside the general "Adena homeland" have also produced substantial Adena evidence. The Lee Mound in Preble County, which contained a unique seven inch Flint Ridge spear, has received little attention. In addition there is a major Adena presence in Darke County and Mercer County as evidenced by surface-found collections.

In the symposia convened to study the "Adena problem" — especially in its Ohio homeland — the aforementioned evidence is not spoken of. However, if the "Adena problem" is ever to be solved, these phenomena must be taken into account.

The Adena people made a wide variety of distinctive slate gorgets and pendants nearly all of which have been reported from mound contexts across the Adena area.

One of the most often asked questions about these, and similar objects from other cultures, is "what were these objects used for?" Unfortunately, no one, not even noted archaeological scholars, have addressed this question. The problem is particularly exacerbated on the professional side in that they rarely examine or are familiar with the variety of Adena artifacts that have been found on the surface of the ground — the result of farming operations — which obviously do not come from excavation contexts.

Collectors are not often accorded the opportunity to study the objects taken from those old early Adena mound excavations, a majority of which haven't even been shown in a formal report or have never had photographs of them published. A comparison of the mound material with that from surface collections might reveal new types or varieties or other unknown aspects of this well-publicized but little published Ohio culture.

For example, there are a considerable number of Adena Expanded Center gorgets which are totally finished except for the perforations. Over the years I have heard that "they were too hard to drill", "the maker died before he could drill them", "it's a type of its own" or many other reasons for the lack of drilling. In my opinion, since many of these are so finely finished, I believe that they were specially made burial objects which didn't require drilling. Interestingly, few other Adena slate gorgets or pendants display such treatment.

In the accompanying plates are two varieties of the Adena bi-concave gorget. The type has been reported from many Adena mound contexts. The first variety — and the most easily recognized — has ends that are curved outward in gentle arcs while the centers are indented with a similar, longer arc. The perforations in both varieties may be from one-side only (the so-called Adena drilling) or they may have been expanded by reaming the holes out from both sides.

The second is a variety of the expanded center but with less accented features. The ends are only slightly excurvate or even straight. The sides are gently convex but only slightly so. Both styles are fairly thick in cross-section — a normal Adena trait.

For those who would like an in-depth study of Adena, Don Dragoo's *Mounds for the Dead* is probably the most comprehensive book yet published on Ohio's unique culture.

** It was brought to my home for picturing and publication, but unfortunately my pictures of this fine seven inch piece were a disaster, and even more regrettable was that I lost the name and address of the owner — I still have hopes of publishing it.*



Figure 1. (Converse) Adena bi-concave gorgets. Preble Co., Preble Co., Logan Co., Montgomery Co.



Figure 1. (Converse) Variety of Adena bi-concave gorgets. Ross Co., Fairfield Co., Cuyahoga Co., Delaware Co.